

Belcourt, Christi Marlene (1966-)

Christi Belcourt—Michif painter, craftsperson, writer, and activist—was born in Scarborough, Ontario in September, 1966. She is the daughter of Tony Belcourt and Judith Pierce-Martin (née Streach). Her father was vice-president of the Métis Association of Alberta (1969), and was the founding president of the Native Council of Canada (1971-1974). He recently retired from his position as president of the Métis Nation of Ontario. Her siblings are graphic designer, Suzanne Belcourt and filmmaker, Shane Belcourt.

Christi Belcourt is the initiator and lead coordinator behind *Walking With Our Sisters: A Commemorative Art Installation for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women of Canada*, which is currently touring Canada. This large collaborative art piece displays over 1,871 pairs of moccasin tops or “vamps” commemorating and representing an estimated 1,181 Indigenous women and girls who have been murdered or have gone missing in Canada since 1961.

Each pair of vamps represents one missing or murdered Aboriginal woman. The unfinished moccasins represent the unfinished lives of these women whose lives were cut short by murder. Over 1300 artists, including family members of the murdered or missing women, have created these vamps. The exhibit, which started in 2013, will tour for seven years. The artwork and funding has all been crowd-sourced.

Christi Belcourt is recognized as one of the preeminent Métis artists in Canada. In 2001, art curator Catherine Mattes included her in a review of Métis art and artists saying: “Emerging Métis artist Christi Belcourt has been refining themes within her paintings, which reflect, renewed Métis pride and a strong sense of Aboriginal heritage. Her themes are in three topic areas, Florals—inspired by Métis beadwork patterns; Water—honouring the sacred relationship of all creatures to water; and Métis History—depicting Métis people and events.”¹

Christi Belcourt’s artwork has been commissioned by the Louis Riel Institute (LRI), the Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI), the Nature Conservancy of Canada, and the Centre for Traditional Knowledge and Museum and Nature. It is found in the permanent collections of the Thunder Bay Art Gallery, LRI, GDI, and the Canadian Museum of History, First People’s Hall. She is a past recipient of awards from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, the Chalmers Family Fund, and the Métis Nation of Ontario.

Christi Belcourt is the author of *Medicines to Help Us*,² a print and companion booklet based on her painting of the same name, which is part of the GDI Collection. She presented at the ninth annual New Sun Conference on Aboriginal Arts: *Something Else Again!* which took place at Carleton University in 2010. Her floral mural—*My Heart (Is Beautiful)*—was used for the conference poster and is now a part of the GDI Collection as is *Great Métis of our Time*, which includes portraits of Harry Daniels, Maria Campbell, Steve Powley, Jean Telliet, and Tony Belcourt. Similar portraits also held in the GDI Collection by Christi Belcourt include those of Louis Riel, Gabriel Dumont, Rose Fleury, and Olive Dickason.

On November 26, 2012, Christi Belcourt’s stained glass piece titled “Giniigaaniimenaaning” (“Looking Ahead”) was installed and unveiled in Ottawa. The stained glass window in the Centre Block of Parliament was commissioned to recognize the survivors of Indian Residential Schools and their families, as well as the Prime Minister’s historic apology in 2008. Belcourt also played a key role in the development of the medals that were awarded at the 2015 Pan Am/Parapan Am Games in Toronto. She also inspired a collection from the Italian fashion house of Valentino based on her painting *Water Song*. In 2016, Christi Belcourt was selected as the winner of the inaugural Governor General’s Innovation Award from the Canada Council for the Arts.³



1 Catherine Mattes, “Métis Perspectives in Contemporary Art.” In eds., *Métis Legacy*, Lawrence J. Barkwell, Leah Dorion and Darren R. Préfontaine. Winnipeg, MB: Pemmican Publications, 2001, 192.

2 Christi Belcourt, *Medicines to Help Us: Traditional Métis Plant Use. Study Prints and Resource Guide*. Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2007. There are contributions to the text on traditional plant use by Métis Elders Rose Richardson and Olive Whitford. The book’s Michif translations are by Rita Flamand with northern Saskatchewan Michif translations by Laura Burnouf.

3 “Christi Belcourt, winner of the inaugural Governor General’s Innovation Award,” Canada Council for the Arts. <http://canadacouncil.ca/press/2016/04/christi-belcourt-winner>.